

Wind Cave National Park

National Park Service
Department of the Interior



Sanson Ranch

Carl Sanson and his family ranched this area for 105 years. Terrible weather, fires, and personal tragedies were just some of the many hardships he faced. However, like other ranchers, he cared for and protected the land and had many wonderful experiences during his lifetime. Carl said ranch life in the Black Hills was “next-year country.” If things were bad one year, he hoped for things to be better the next year. The Sanson family operated the ranch from 1882 until 1987.

The prairie is a harsh environment. Extreme variations of temperature, moisture, and wind are always present. To eke out a living on the prairie, one must be ready to meet these conditions head on and Carl Sanson was the type of person to do just that. He and his family successfully homesteaded a large plot of land that is now part of Wind Cave National Park. He endured by being able to adapt, to change with the times and conditions.

The homestead of Sanson’s father and later Sanson himself is testament to the tenacity of these early homesteaders and how they protected and cared for the land. According to Sanson, “it took courage to live in a place eight miles from town [Buffalo Gap], with neighbors three to ten miles apart. There were many problems along the way – dry years, grasshoppers, hail storms, and range fires, but they endured them all.”

After one year of high school I had to stay home and do the work here. I was 15 at the time and have been here ever since. I must have done something right. . . . When I reach down and pick up a handful of dirt, I can say it is mine. To me there is a lot of satisfaction being able to say that. Carl Sanson 1987

